

REMARKS

Applicants thank the Examiner for the very thorough consideration given the present application.

Claims 2, 4-15, 20, and 25-38, are now present in this application, of which claim 20 is independent. By this amendment, claims 1, 3, 16-19, and 21-24 have been canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer, and claims 2, 4-6, 25-29, and 34-37 have been amended. No new matter has been added.

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is respectfully requested.

Request for Withdrawal of Finality of Office Action

Applicants respectfully submit that the failure to treat claims 35-38 on the merits necessitates that the finality of the previous Office Action be withdrawn. None of the rejections by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103 includes a discussion of the rejection of claims 35-38, which were included in the December 10, 2007 amendment.

Furthermore, claims 29-33 were rejected as if they depended from original claim 1, but the December 10 Amendment changed the dependency from independent claim 1 to independent claim 19, and therefore, these claims should also have been indicated as being allowable.

Accordingly, withdrawal of the finality of the previous Office Action, and a second Office Action on the merits are respectfully requested. However, because all dependent claims have been amended to depend from allowed claim 20, the application should be in condition for allowance.

Reasons for Entry of Amendments

At the outset, it is respectfully requested that this Amendment be entered into the Official File in view of the fact that the amendments to the claims automatically place the application in condition for allowance.

Furthermore, it is respectfully requested that this Amendment be entered into the Official File in view of the fact that the previous Office Action was improperly made Final.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 1-4, 14, 17, 18, 22, 25-29, and 34 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Hockh in view of either Fraraccio or Koblenzer; claims 5, 23, and 24 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the references applied to claims 1 and 18 in view of Mollinari; claims 6-10, 13-16, 30, and 33 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the references applied to claims 1 and 18 in view of either Violi or Treiber; claims 11 and 32 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the references applied to claims 1 and 18 in view of Groom; claim 12 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the references applied to claims 1 and 18 in view of Pickering. These rejections are respectfully traversed.

Complete discussions of the Examiner's rejections are set forth in the Office Action, and are not being repeated here.

While not conceding the appropriateness of the Examiner's rejection, but merely to advance prosecution of the instant application, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1, 3, 16-18, and 21-24 have been canceled, thus rendering portions of these rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 103 moot. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are respectfully requested.

With regard to the rejection of claims 2, 4-15, and 25-34, while not conceding the appropriateness of the Examiner's rejection, but merely to advance prosecution of the instant application, Applicants respectfully submit that these claims have been amended or originally depended from allowed independent claim 20, and therefore these claims are also allowable based on their dependence from claim 20, as well as for their additionally recited subject matter. Reconsideration and allowance thereof are respectfully requested.

Allowable Subject Matter

The Examiner states that claims 19 and 20 are allowed. Applicants thank the Examiner for the early indication of allowable subject matter in this application. As noted above, claims 2, 4-17, and 25-34 depend, either directly or indirectly, from independent claim 20, and are therefore allowable based on their dependence from independent claim 20. Claims 35-38, which were not addressed by the Examiner, depend, either directly or indirectly, from independent claim 20, and are

therefore allowable based on their dependence from claim 20, as well as for their additionally recited subject matter.

Office Action

The Office Action contains numerous characterizations of the invention, the claims, and the related art, with which Applicants do not necessarily agree. Unless expressly noted otherwise, Applicants decline to subscribe to any statement or characterization in the Office Action.

CONCLUSION

All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicants therefore respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider all presently outstanding rejections and that they be withdrawn. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and as such, the present application is in condition for allowance.

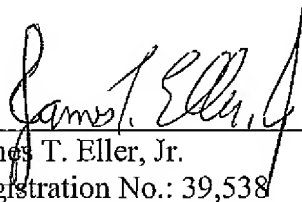
If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone Chad D. Wells, Registration No. 50,875, at (703) 205-8000, in the Washington, D.C. area.

Prompt and favorable consideration of this Amendment is respectfully requested.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

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Respectfully submitted,

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